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Scale, Community and ‘Eurafrica’: A Response to Hansen and Jonsson

GARY MARKS

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Peo Hansen and Stefan Jonsson (hereafter H-J) have written a thought-provoking response to my *JCMS* article (Marks, 2012), highlighting the importance of ‘*Eurafrigue*’ on which Hansen and Jonsson have written several articles and now a book (Hansen and Jonsson, forthcoming). However, they do not come to terms with my argument, and while they assemble some interesting quotations, their account overestimates the imperial ambitions of the founders of the European Union (EU).

The first part of H-J’s response reveals that one of the founders of the EU, Paul-Henri Spaak, expounded the benefits of jurisdictional scale in Eurafrica, the project to tie African colonies to Europe. If we take this at face value, there were two projects to reap scale in the early stages of European integration: the creation of a European common market, and the extension of that market to Africa. Histories of European integration regard the first as vastly more important than the second,¹ but both are consistent with the notion that the benefits of scale in the provision of pure public goods motivate the creation of very large jurisdictions.

But what of community? Eurafrica failed to get off the ground because it encompassed subject communities that were mobilizing behind the idea of independent statehood. European sea empires were founded on sail and gunpowder which allowed European powers to coerce distant, less technologically advanced peoples.² But after World War II even diehard imperialists realized that the game had changed. As Félix Houphouët-Boigny, prime minister of Ivory Coast, wrote in a 1957 *Foreign Affairs* article: ‘Today, no nation, however powerful, can pretend to impose its absolute will on another for long’ (Houphouët-Boigny, 1957, p. 597). British attempts to mollify indigenous elites with participation in local government simply ratcheted up demands for national autonomy. French efforts to sustain empire by a double-edged policy of suppression and assimilation – giving elites ‘a new political status inside the French community’ – worked no better in post-war North Africa than in Italy under Napoleonic rule. By the end of 1960, European empires had crumbled in negotiated independence and bloody revolt, and the rhetoric of *Eurafrigue* was derelict.

Resistance on the part of previously subjugated communities raised the costs of empire and reduced its benefits. This is consistent with the core arguments of ‘Europe and Its Empires’. Large polities or empires provide pure public goods more cheaply by virtue of

¹ Eurafrica does not merit much attention in major histories of early European integration, including Duchêne’s magisterial biography of Monnet (Duchêne, 1994), Haas’ *Uniting of Europe* (Haas, 1958) and Milward’s *European Rescue of the Nation State* (Milward, 1992).

² Unlike the United States and Russia, these countries lacked hinterlands sparsely peopled by technologically primitive communities.

their size, but their territorial diversity leads to demands for self-rule that can tear the empire apart. Ruling elites have a limited repertoire of response consisting of accommodation, assimilation and elimination.³

H-J make a series of claims concerning Eurafrica, and while these are unrelated to my article, they are worth noting. H-J believe that Eurafrica was ‘a central objective’ of European integration, but this is overblown.⁴ The idea of including the overseas territories into the common market was introduced at a late stage in the negotiations in 1956, and then only at French insistence. When *Eurafrica* unravelled, it had little effect on the course of European integration. In relation to the single market, Eurafrica was a side-show, and while Spaak justified it in terms of scale (and hence in terms consistent with ‘Europe and Its Empires’), it soon revealed itself to be a chimera.

H-J repeatedly claim that *Eurafrica* was supported by non-colonial powers, including West Germany which ‘enthusiastically embraced’ it. This does not pay nearly enough attention to power politics among the founding members of the EU (Rempe, 2011). The French wish to share the financial burden of its empire was resisted by the Netherlands and Germany on financial grounds and because they feared involvement in colonial debacle. Moreover, Dutch and Germans had little commerce with French overseas territories, and both countries were concerned that preferential treatment of French colonies would distort their trade. Instead of conceiving Eurafrica as a common goal of the Six, it is more plausible to consider it a side-payment to gain French consent to the common market.

If H-J had wanted to take on the argument of ‘Europe and Its Empires’ they might have argued that the additional information they put on the table refines or invalidates its conclusions. H-J might have raised an alternative explanation – for example, imperial overstretch, venality of the metropole, diseconomies of scale. H-J do neither of these things. Their purpose is much narrower – namely, to revisit the motives of the founders of the EU – but their claims appear to be exaggerated and their evidence selective.

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³ The argument in ‘Europe and Its Empires’ is set out in general terms, at what has been called the huge end of the analytical spectrum. Probing individual cases, such as the EU, requires a higher level of resolution and a theory of political contestation that seeks to explain when, how, and by whom, scale and community are mobilized (Hooghe and Marks, 2009).

⁴ In addition to sources listed by H-J, I have found Martin Rempe’s unpublished paper (Rempe, 2011) and book (Rempe, 2012) particularly useful in charting the twists and turns of Europe’s African policies. On German opposition to Eurafrica, see Van der Lee (1960, p. 370) and Horié (1982, pp. 83ff.).

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